

This is how  
**germs spread...**  
It's sickening!



Have you ever had the flu? If so, you know it's not the same thing as a "bad cold." Flu—the common name for influenza—can make you feel very sick with a severe headache and body aches, fever, debilitating cough and exhaustion. These symptoms can last for a week, and coughing and fatigue can sometimes persist for several weeks. If you've never had the flu, ask someone who has. They'll tell you it's a very good idea to fight the flu any way you can.



### **Best Idea: Get the Flu Vaccine, Not the Flu!**

Getting flu vaccine is the single most effective way to avoid getting the flu. Ask your health care provider to schedule you for a flu shot or the nasal spray flu vaccine every year. Last year's vaccine won't protect you against this year's flu.

### **Another Great Idea: Keep Your Germs to Yourself!**

Flu germs spread from person to person by way of coughing, sneezing or simply talking. That's because droplets from an infected person get into the air and are inhaled by people nearby. Anyone within three feet can easily be infected. Flu germs also are spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. Flu germs can live for hours on surfaces like doorknobs, desks and tables. Too bad they don't glow green, so we could see them and avoid coming in contact with them! But be aware—they're there. Fortunately, there are ways to avoid them.

Start by learning healthy habits that can help prevent you from getting infected with flu or spreading flu germs at home, school or work. Simple actions, like covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze and cleaning your hands often, can stop flu germs; cold! Take these precautions even if you don't feel sick. You could be infected with flu and able to spread germs 24 hours before your symptoms begin.

## Cover Your Cough

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper arm, not your hands.
- Put your used tissues in a wastebasket.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub (also called a hand sanitizer.)
- Stay home while ill, but if you must go out in public (for instance, to seek medical care), wear a surgical or procedure mask.



## Keep Your Hands Clean

Your hands may look clean, but they have germs on them that could make you or someone else sick. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Wash your hands often with soap for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand rub to protect yourself from germs and avoid spreading them to others.

Soap or alcohol-based hand rub kills the flu virus. When water is not available, alcohol-based hand rubs may be used. It's especially important to clean your hands:

- After wiping or blowing your nose or coughing or sneezing;
- After using the bathroom;
- After being in contact with or being near someone who is ill;
- After touching handrails, doorknobs, telephones or other things handled by many people;
- Before and after eating or drinking;
- Before handling food, especially ready-to-eat foods like salads and sandwiches; and
- After handling garbage or trash.

### ***How to wash your hands:***

- *Wet your hands with warm running water.*
- *Lather with soap and scrub between fingers, on the backs of your hands, and under nails.*
- *Wash for at least 20 seconds. That's about as long as it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice.*
- *Dry your hands. Use paper towels or electric hand dryers.*
- *Use a paper towel when you turn off the tap.*

### ***How to use alcohol-based hand rub:***

- *Dispense alcohol-based hand rub into palm of hand.*
- *Rub hands together working the gel between your fingers, under nails and back of hands.*
- *Continue rubbing hands until they are dry.*
- *Do not rinse hands or dry hands with a paper towel.*

## Stay Home if you're Sick:

It's important to avoid close contact with others if you are ill or have the flu. Stay home from work or school, and avoid other public places.

- If you need food or medicines, ask others who are healthy to bring them to you rather than going to the store yourself. Friends or helpers can leave supplies outside your door so that you do not expose them to the flu.
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels or other personal items.
- Get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.



## Other Tips to Fight the Flu:



For a stronger immune system, get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat a well balanced diet every day.

- Be a “healthy habits” role model for your children.
- Keep your distance from someone who has flu symptoms.

## **Learn More:**

[www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov)

[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)



State of New York  
Department of Health